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ART. VII. — *A Dissertation on the Nature and Character of the Chinese System of Writing ; in a Letter to John Vaughan, Esq.* By PETER S. DU PONCEAU, LL. D., President of the American Philosophical Society, of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and of the Athenæum of Philadelphia ; Corresponding Member of the Institute of France, &c. &c. *To which are subjoined a Vocabulary of the Cochinchinese Language*, by Father JOSEPH MORRONE, R. C. Missionary at Saigon ; *with References to Plates containing the Characters belonging to each Word, and with Notes showing the degree of Affinity existing between the Chinese and Cochinchinese Languages, and the Use they respectively make of their Common System of Writing*, by M. DE LA PALUN, late Consul of France at Richmond in Virginia ; *and a Cochinchinese and Latin Dictionary, in Use among the R. C. Missions in Cochinchina.* Published by Order of the American Philosophical Society. Philadelphia. 1838. 8vo. pp. xxxii. and 375.

THIS is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable publications of the present day. The able author, — the veteran philologist of America, — was the first writer, who gave to the learned world just views of the extraordinary structure and peculiarities of the aboriginal languages of this continent ; views, which were originally opened in his interesting “Correspondence” with the late Reverend Mr. Heckewelder, and in his “Report to the Philosophical Society at Philadelphia” (between the years 1816 and 1819), and which have been more fully developed in the various publications made by him since that period. The last of these is yet hardly known in the United States, in consequence of its being written in the French language, conformably to a rule of the Institute of France, to which body it was offered as a competitor for the prize established by Count Volney for the advancement of Comparative Philology, or, as it is sometimes technically called, *the Science of Linguistics*. The title of it is, “Mémoire sur le Système Grammatical des Langues de quelques Nations Indiennes de l’Amérique du Nord.” It deserves the more particular notice, as it is the latest work of Mr. Du Ponceau on that subject, and is

the first instance, within our knowledge, in which an American author has had the distinction of obtaining one of the prizes, offered by the French Institute, for the best essay on any of the literary questions proposed by that learned body. In the present case, the Institute not only did the author the honor to award to him the well-merited prize, but conferred on him the additional distinction of subscribing for a part of the edition, as "a mark of the particular satisfaction," which his profound and learned work had afforded them.*

We have adverted to that work for the purpose of drawing the attention of our readers to the extended and philosophical views, which Mr. Du Ponceau is accustomed to take of the subjects that come under his investigation. Some of the native dialects of America, it is true, had been before observed to abound with highly compounded words; and our venerable "apostle Eliot," in speaking of the Massachusetts Indians and their language, after giving an example of their long words, says, in the quaint style of his age;

"It seems their desires are slow but strong,
Because they be utter'd *double-breath't* and *long*."†

Mr. Du Ponceau, however, was the first writer who took a comprehensive view of the languages of the whole continent, and established the general conclusion, that the American dialects, from one extremity of the continent to the other (with perhaps some exceptions), form a distinct class, or family; which, from their highly compounded character, he has happily designated by the term *polysynthetic*.

Now these complex American dialects are at one extremity of the series, or chain, of human languages; while at the other we find the very simple and artificial language of China; these two extremes, when contrasted with each other, presenting this extraordinary phenomenon, that the savage tribes of the New World, though destitute of all

* The Committee of the Institute at that time (1834) consisted of MM. Destut de Tracy, Raynouard (president), Jay, Eugène Burnouf (secretary), Amédée Jaubert, Reinaud, Flourens. M. de Tracy and M. Raynouard were afterwards succeeded by M. A. Dupin, and M. Feletz; M. Amédée Jaubert being president. The prize question proposed was; "To determine the grammatical character of the Languages of North America, known under the names of the Lenni-Lenapè, Mohegan, and Chippeway." Mr. Du Ponceau's *Mémoire* was published at Paris, 1838, in 8vo. pp. 464.

† Eliot's "Massachusetts Indian Grammar," in *Mass. Hist. Collections*, Vol. IX. Second Series, p. 243.

literature and even of *written* languages, are found to be in possession of highly complex and artificial forms of speech, — which would seem to be the result of cultivation, — while in the Old World, the ingenious Chinese, who were civilized and had a national literature even before the glorious days of Greece and Rome, have for four thousand years had an extremely simple, not to say rude and inartificial language, that, according to the common theories, seems to be the infancy of human speech. This phenomenon well deserves the consideration of the philosophical inquirer, and especially of those speculatists, who have assumed a certain necessary connexion between what is considered the refined or artificial state of a language, and the cultivation of the human race ; but it is not our purpose to enter upon an examination of this great question on the present occasion.

Our learned author having, as we remarked, thus investigated the structure of the complex Indian dialects of America, now goes to the other continent, to the

“ plains
Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
With wind and sail their cany wagons light,” *

and proceeds to examine the true nature and character of the *monosyllabic language of China* ; which, as we have just observed, forms the other extreme of the chain of languages. And, as a general remark, we may here add, with confidence, that the present able work will reflect as much honor upon the author and his country, as his various publications on the American languages have done ; while in Europe it will attract the greater attention, from the circumstance, that the subject itself is more interesting to the learned in that quarter of the world, and that Mr. Du Ponceau has been the first to maintain views of the real nature of the Chinese language directly in opposition to the opinions hitherto entertained by the scholars of Europe. For these reasons, and especially as the reputation of our literature has an interest in the case, we shall devote more space to the subject than under ordinary circumstances we should be willing to do. But, though the discussion may lead to some minute particulars, we have no fears that the subject itself will not possess interest enough to induce readers of all classes to

* Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book III. 438.

follow us ; not merely professed scholars, but all those persons also, who are ambitious of such a portion of general knowledge upon different subjects, as belongs to what Milton calls a "generous education."

In order, however, to make the discussion more readily intelligible to those readers who may not have directed their attention to the points which have been in controversy among philologists, it will be necessary to give a short account of the study of the Chinese language as hitherto pursued in Europe, particularly in Great Britain and France.

A leading British review several years ago observed, that it was "rather remarkable," that, "notwithstanding the great commercial intercourse which England had maintained with China for more than a century," the *Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, or *Penal Code* of China, translated by Sir George Staunton in the year 1810, should have been "the first work ever rendered out of that language (Chinese) directly into our own."* The same journal, on another occasion, asked with some emphasis ; "Why has it not been made a point to have Englishmen acquainted with the language of China ? It has been learned by Portuguese, by Italians, by Frenchmen. The nation, which above all others maintains the greatest intercourse with China ; the nation, which above all has the greatest interest dependent on that intercourse ; the nation, which has had so many of her sons living for so many years on Chinese ground, was under the necessity of *going to Naples for an interpreter, when she thought of sending an embassy to China.*" (!) †

The truth is, however unpalatable a truth it may be, — and we advert to it, not in that taunting spirit which is so often displayed in certain transatlantic journals, but with regret, — the truth is, we say, that the state of Chinese studies in Great Britain, for a long time, and even to our own day, has been comparatively low. A striking illustration of this state of things will be found in the extraordinary and scarcely credible, though well authenticated anecdote of that accomplished scholar, Sir William Jones, (of whom no man can speak but with admiration and reverence,) who is supposed to have translated some Chinese odes, and yet has inserted in his own handwriting, as it is said, on one of the

* *Edinb. Review*, Vol. XVI. p. 477. † *Ibid.* Vol. XIV. pp. 412, 413.

blank pages of a Chinese manuscript *Dictionary*, presented to the Royal Society, a remark to this effect, — that, if the letters *A* and *B* can be supplied, the work will be inestimable.(!) The defect, as has been observed, was in his knowledge, and not in the dictionary ; for the Chinese have no word which, properly speaking, can be said to begin with the vocal *A*, nor does the power of *B*, as all Chinese scholars know, enter into their language. The same distinguished scholar frankly avows, that “ it is to our French neighbours we are indebted for almost every effort, that has been made to elucidate the language and literature of China.”

The well-known traveller, Mr. Barrow, who accompanied the English embassy of Lord Macartney to China, became sensible of the general ignorance of the language and literature of China, which at that time prevailed in England. “ In Great Britain,” says he, “ we have known still less of the Chinese language and Chinese literature than on the continent ;” and he relates the following amusing anecdote in relation to this subject.

“ It is not many years ago, that one of the small copper coins of China, stamped in the reign and with the name of the late *Tchien-lung* (or, as he is usually called in the southern dialect of China, *Kien-long*), was picked up in a bog in Ireland, and, being considered as a great curiosity, was carried to an indefatigable antiquary, whose researches have been of considerable use in investigating the ancient history and language of that island. Not knowing the Chinese character nor their coin, it was natural enough for him to compare them with some language with which he was acquainted ; and the conclusion he drew was, that the four characters on the face [the emperor’s name and the value of the coin] were ancient Syriac ; and that the reverse [which are Mantchoo letters] appeared to be astronomical or talismanic characters, of which he could give no explanation [!] ” *

Another British writer, the Reverend W. Milne, who was among the first missionaries sent from England to China, states, that when the mission was first suggested (in 1807),—

“ There were no helps in English to assist in the acquisition of the Chinese language. England knew and cared little about China beyond its commerce. . . . Some even doubted the practicability of acquiring the language to any available

* Barrow’s *Travels in China*, p. 258, 4to ed.

degree. At that time there was *but one British subject* [Sir George Thomas Staunton] who could be said to know the Chinese language ; and he was not then residing in the British dominions.”*

It should be remarked, that Catholic missionaries, from France, Italy, and Portugal, had then been in China for about two hundred and forty years ; they had transmitted to Europe, as Mr. Milne candidly states, accounts of every thing that seemed most interesting ; and those countries were “ far before our own ” in the knowledge of China.†

The apology made for this ignorance, is at once amusing and instructive. The respectable author just quoted says, with much *naïveté* and candor ;

“ There were two particular causes for the degree of ignorance in Britain relative to China. One was, the accounts which had been transmitted to Europe by the Catholic missionaries were all published in foreign languages [!], and often in the expensive and unwieldy size of quartos and folios. [!] Some of the missionaries were themselves verbose in the extreme ; and many of their manuscripts had fallen into the hands of diffuse and wordy French writers, who swelled them to an enormous bulk, ... and it required a *considerable knowledge of the French tongue*, and an uncommon degree of leisure, patience, and fortitude, to encounter the fifteen quarto volumes of the *Mémoires*, or to wade through the twenty-six volumes, duodecimo, of the *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses*, which also contain detached pieces of information concerning China [!] ”‡

Another reason assigned for the prevailing ignorance was, that those who did take the trouble to read the accounts given of China by the Catholic writers, *would not believe them*. Who would have supposed, for example, that the calm and philosophic Adam Smith, in speaking of the accounts of the Chinese roads, canals, and other public works, would have indulged himself in the following coarse language ; which subsequent accounts of China have proved to be unjustifiable ;

“ “ The accounts of those works, however, which have been transmitted to Europe, have generally been drawn up by weak and wondering travellers ; frequently, by *stupid* and *lying* missionaries. If they had been examined by more intelligent eyes, and if the accounts of them had been reported by *more*

* *Retrospect of the first Ten Years of the Protestant Mission to China*, &c., by William Milne, (Malacca, 1820,) p. 43.

† *Ibid.* p. 44.

‡ *Ibid.* pp. 45, 46.

faithful witnesses, they would not, perhaps, appear to be so wonderful.*

Yet these accounts of “weak and wondering travellers,” and of “stupid and lying missionaries,” to which, however, Smith’s work is much indebted, are now found to be quite as trustworthy as the accounts we have of most other parts of the globe. So true is the reflection of Sir William Jones, that “we all love to excuse or to conceal our ignorance, and are seldom willing to allow any excellence beyond the limits of our own attainments ; like the savages, who thought that the sun rose and set for them alone, and could not imagine that the waves, which surrounded their island, left coral and pearls upon any other shore.”†

It is true, indeed, that a considerable time has elapsed since the period just mentioned ; and a few individuals have, in the interval, made respectable contributions to the very meagre and scanty common stock of that day. But what advances must we infer to have been made in Chinese studies in England since that time, when we find a leading Review of that country, so lately as July last, gravely appealing to that literary fanatic, De Pauw, and that disgraced literary charlatan, Dr. Hager, as *authorities* on the subject of the Chinese language !‡ two individuals, who, as writers on this subject, hardly stand high enough to draw upon themselves even the contempt of the continental philologists of the present day. We had really supposed, that the unintelligible Chinese lucubrations of the latter, and his senseless reveries on the Babylonian bricks, had consigned the sheets of his books to other uses than that of serving for authorities even to a hasty reviewer, — *raptus in culinam, vel thuris piperisque cucullus*.

The accomplished English scholar, to whom we have before referred, when lamenting the neglect of the Persian language by his countrymen, observes, with equal elegance and truth, and in terms alike applicable to their neglect of the Chinese, that

“Some men never heard of the Asiatic writings, and others

* Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, Book V. Chap. 1, Part 3, Vol. III. p. 104, edit. 1822.

† *Persian Grammar*, Preface, p. 1.

‡ *Foreign Quart. Rev.* for July, 1838. De Pauw is well known to scholars, of all countries ; and the philologists of the Continent will inform this English reviewer of the true character and value of Hager’s speculations.

will not be convinced that there is any thing valuable in them ; some detest the Persians, because they believe in Mahomet, and others *despise their language because they do not understand it* ; and they would, perhaps, have persisted in despising it, if they had not been animated by the most powerful incentive, that can influence the mind of man, — interest was the magic wand, which brought them all within one circle ; interest was the charm, which gave the languages of the East a real and solid importance.”*

But if this “ powerful incentive ” has produced the effect here ascribed to it in the case of the Persian and East Indian languages, yet even this interest, which is not the most honorable national stimulus, has produced but little effect in advancing the study of the Chinese language and literature. What may be the fruits of the lately established Oriental College in Hertford, we have not yet the means of judging ; we hope for the best. At present, however, it is a truth, that Chinese studies in England have for some time appeared to be in a languid state, though the past reputation of the national school has been a little elevated by the desultory efforts of a few pious and devoted individuals connected with the missionary establishments ; there has been, as Burke once said of a more important subject, a little rippling in that smooth water, which indicates something alive under it.

In France, on the contrary, to say nothing of Germany, — in France, we say, where a stimulus of a higher character than the poor incentive of “ interest ” has been the moving cause, Chinese studies have advanced within the last thirty years beyond all reasonable anticipation. The names of Rémusat, Klaproth, and others among the dead, and a bright constellation among the living, have, with the patronage of the government, given an impulse, which has enabled France to outstrip her great rival in this branch of knowledge. France was long ago wise enough to see the advantage resulting to her national reputation from the establishment of professorships of Chinese as well as of other languages ; and, as a late sensible English writer justly observes, in peculiarly guarded terms, “ that nothing of the kind should as yet (1836) have existed in England, is *remarkable*.”† Indeed,

* Jones's *Persian Grammar*, Preface.

† *The Chinese* ; by John F. Davis, Esquire, Vol. II. p. 144 ; published in the “ Library of Entertaining Knowledge,” London, 1836.

we think it would not be hazarding much, to affirm, that at this moment, a student would be able, in a given time, to acquire a more thorough and exact knowledge of the Chinese language and literature in the Asiatic school at Paris, than he would, even in the city of Canton itself, with the ordinary means which he would there be able to command. We would not be so absurd as to assert, that he would be better able to *converse* in the language, than he would by daily intercourse with natives of the country ; but that he would find more aids, adapted to Europeans, for understanding the true nature and character of the language and literature, than he would in any other country.

This state of things is the more “remarkable,” as, in addition to the inducements and facilities afforded by the commercial intercourse of England, the Chinese language has a nearer resemblance to our own than to the French, in one of its striking features, the absence of all inflections in the principal parts of speech ; so that it is proportionably more easy of acquisition to Englishmen than to Frenchmen. But we must proceed to the work before us.

It is justly observed by Mr. Du Ponceau, that,

“When, in the last century, the Chinese language, through the writings of the Catholic missionaries, became known to the learned of Europe, great astonishment was excited by its simple, ungrammatical structure, by its complicated graphic system, and by the small number of its monosyllables compared with the immense quantity of the characters employed in writing. Every new and extraordinary object must, with the mass of mankind, be a *monster* or a *miracle* ; the latter was preferred. Admiration succeeded surprise, and then imagination did its work. The Chinese writing was called *hieroglyphic*, *ideographic*, and said to represent *ideas* entirely independent of *speech*. It was almost exclusively considered as *the* language ; and the spoken words were called its *pronunciation*, as if they were only a secondary mode of communicating ideas, and dependent upon the ocular method. At last it was said, that the Chinese *characters* were read and understood, as in China, by nations entirely ignorant of the *spoken* idiom. In short, those visible signs were held up by enthusiasts as a model for an universal language, which should reach the mind through the eyes, without the aid of articulate sounds. These enthusiastic opinions were introduced into Europe by the Catholic missionaries, about the middle of the last century. Those venerable men imbibed them from the Chinese literati, whose national

vanity is without bounds. They were received as sacred oracles, and spread rapidly among the learned, who, like other men, are apt to be smitten with the wonderful. Even in this enlightened age these opinions are yet supported, to a greater or lesser extent, by men whose judgment in other matters is entitled to the respect of all." — *Dissertation*, p. 7.

The learned author adds, that he might quote, to this point, numberless passages from the writings of the early missionaries, showing the wild ideas which they entertained of the Chinese writing; but he contents himself with citing one example only, which is from Father *Cibot*, who wrote from Pekin, under the assumed name of Father *Ko*, a Chinese Jesuit. That author says, the Chinese characters are composed of symbols and images, which are *unconnected with any sound*, and may be *read in all languages* (!) They form a kind of intellectual, algebraical, metaphysical, and ideal painting, which expresses thoughts, and represents them by analogy, by relation, by convention, &c.*

The history of this prevalent opinion is so remarkable, and so instructive, — by showing us with what servility succeeding writers adopt, without examination, the theories and even vagaries of their predecessors, — that we shall ask the reader's attention to it for a few moments.

The accounts of the Catholic missionaries, to which Mr. Du Ponceau refers, are in substance embodied in the great work entitled "Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise," by the Jesuit Du Halde; which was diligently compiled from the original "Relations" of the Catholic Missionaries residing in China, and is, notwithstanding its imperfections, the best systematic account of that extraordinary and almost inaccessible people. We are indebted to France also for this work; and, as Mr. Davis observes, in his clever publication before cited, "it is singular, that no general and systematic work on China has ever yet been produced in this country (England). . . . Père Du Halde's compilation has still remained the only methodized source of information on the subject."†

Now, in respect to the Chinese language, Du Halde, following the enthusiastic accounts of the early missionaries, makes the following remarks;

* *Mém. concernant les Chinois*, Vol. I. p. 22. † Vol. I. Introduction, p. 1.

“The language of China has nothing in common with the dead or living languages, with which we are acquainted. All other languages have an alphabet of a certain number of letters, which by their different combinations form syllables and words; it has as many characters and different figures, as there are words. The Chinese have two kinds of language; the one, vulgar and in use among the people, which differs in different provinces; the other, which they call the Mandarin language, is very nearly what the Latin is, among us, for ecclesiastics and learned men.”

The author then adds the following observations, having relation to the question which is the subject of Mr. Du Ponceau's work;

“The characters of *Cochin-China*, *Tonquin*, and *Japan*, are the same with those of *China*, and signify the same things; these nations, however, in speaking, do not utter themselves in the same manner; so that, although the languages are very different, and cannot be mutually understood when *spoken*, yet these nations understand each other very well by *writing*, and all their books are common [!] These characters, in this particular, are like the numerals in arithmetic; various nations make use of them, but give them different names; yet they everywhere signify the same thing.”*

This account of the Chinese characters has been adopted, in substance, and apparently without examination, by subsequent writers of all nations. Even Warburton, — whose extraordinary sagacity first penetrated the mysteries of Egyptian hieroglyphics, nearly a century before Champollion pronounced them to be *phonetic*, — even this acute and vigorous thinker adopted the current opinion of the Chinese characters.† But it must be admitted, at the same time, that this was rather a collateral part of his argument on the subject of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, and consequently did not call for the same concentrated attention, which he gave to his main subject.

Among the later works, the well-known “Account of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China” adopts the opinion

* Du Halde, *Description de la Chine*, Tom. II. pp. 268–270, 4to. edit. 1736.

† Warburton's *Essay on the Egyptian Hieroglyphics*, (extracted from his “Divine Legation of Moses,”) translated into French, and published in 2 vols. 12mo. Paris, 1744.

stated by Du Halde, and compares the Chinese characters to the Arabic numerals, and the written notes in music, which "are uniform and intelligible throughout Europe, notwithstanding the variety of languages." The intelligent traveller, Mr. Barrow, who was private secretary to Lord Macartney on that embassy, entertained, as we should naturally expect, the same opinion. He says ;

" It [the Chinese language] may, however, be considered as the nearest approximation to an universal character that has hitherto been attempted by the learned and ingenious of any nation ; each character conveying at once to the eye, not only simple, but the most combined ideas. The plan of our countryman, Bishop Wilkins, for establishing an universal character, is in all respects so similar to that upon which the Chinese language is constructed, that a reference to the former will be found to convey a very competent idea of the nature of the latter. The universal character of our countryman is, however, more systematic and more philosophical than the plan of the Chinese character."

Mr. Barrow afterwards adds the following remarks ;

" The sounds and various inflections, incidental to languages in general, are not necessary to be attended to in the study of the Chinese characters. They speak equally strong to a person who is deaf and dumb, as the most copious language could do to one in the full enjoyment of all his senses. It is a language addressed *entirely to the eye*, and not to the ear. Just as a piece of music laid before several persons of different nations of Europe would be played by each in the same key, the same measure, and the same air ; so would the Chinese characters be equally understood by the natives of Japan, Tonquin, and Cochin-China ; yet each would give them different names or sounds, that would be wholly unintelligible to one another. When on the present voyage we stopped at Pulo-Condore, the inhabitants, being Cochin-Chinese, had no difficulty in corresponding by writing with our Chinese interpreters, though they could not interchange one intelligible word." *

Malte-Brun, to whom we refer not as a very high authority in a question of philology, but because his popular work on geography is in common use, goes even beyond his predecessors, and discovers a deep state policy of the Chinese

* Barrow's *Travels in China*, pp. 250, 256, 4to edit.

government in compelling the people to adhere to their mother tongue ! His words are ;

“ But the great secret of Chinese policy, and the very basis of the empire, is to be found in an institution which in some measure deprives the inhabitants of the power of forming new thoughts by depriving them of the liberty of expressing them by means of external characters corresponding to the words of their language. Such is the effect of the Chinese mode of writing. It has been compared, though not with much propriety, to the hieroglyphical or figured language of the Egyptians. It can only be compared to those systems of *pasigraphy* or universal character, by which some wrong-headed persons in Europe have brought upon themselves universal ridicule.”*

After such opinions it is not very surprising, that a leading British review should have ventured to make such extraordinary statements, and in such a contemptuous tone, as the following ;

“ The written and spoken language of China, our readers are probably aware, have *no sort of connexion* or relation to each other. Their visible characters represent *things* or *ideas* directly, without any reference to the *sounds* by which the same things may sometimes be expressed. Nay, they represent many things which the Chinese, at least, cannot express by sounds at all. It is a *real* character, in short, which *has nothing to do with words*, and might have been invented by a race of beings who were destitute of the faculty of speaking. The fact, however, appears to be quite undeniable, that they have gone on for many thousand years *pittering* to each other in a jargon which resembles the chuckling of poultry more than the language of men, and have never yet had the sense to put their monosyllables together into articulate words [!]”†

The latest English writer on China, Mr. Davis, to whose interesting volumes we have before referred, follows in the track of his predecessors in respect to the language of that country. He says ;

“ The language of China realizes to a great extent the theory of a universal medium for the communication of ideas, as conceived by Bishop Wilkins, and methodized by him into an

* Malte-Brun's *Geogr.* Book XLIV. Vol. I. p. 412, Amer. ed. in 4to.

† *Edinb. Review*, Vol. V. pp. 276, 280. “ *Pittering*, making a low and shrillish noise : ‘ And when his *pittering* streames are low and thin.’ *R. Greene, Engl. Parn.* 67. *repr.* Herrick applies it to the note of a grasshopper.” — Nares's *Glossary*.

elaborate treatise which he presented to the Royal Society. While the letters of our alphabet are mere symbols of *sounds*, the Chinese characters or words, are symbols of *ideas*, and alike intelligible to the natives of Cochin-China, Japan, Loo-Choo, and Corea, with those of China itself.”*

Such had been the state of opinions among the learned in Europe, for more than a century, as to the real constitution and genius of the Chinese language, when our learned author began to examine into the supposed mysteries of that dialect of human speech ; his views of which were first made public ten years ago, in his well-known letter addressed to the celebrated traveller, Captain Basil Hall (on the 7th of July, 1828), and now republished in the Appendix to the present volume. To this letter, as the first in historical order, relating to this subject, we shall now recur ; since it contains in a condensed form the substance of such information on this curious and interesting question as our limits will allow us to lay before the reader. Mr. Du Ponceau says ;

“I was at first astonished at the wonders, which are ascribed to this mode of *ocular* communication, which appeared to me to be greatly exaggerated ; and I determined to pursue the subject as far as my means would permit me. The result of my investigations does by no means agree with the opinion that is generally entertained. The general opinion which prevails, even among those who are the most proficient in the Chinese idiom, is, that the system or mode of writing which is in use in that country, and which they call the *written* in opposition to the *spoken* language, is an *ocular* method of communicating ideas, entirely independent of speech, and which, without the intervention of words, conveys ideas through the sense of vision directly to the mind. Hence it is called *ideographic*, in contradistinction from the *phonographic* or alphabetical system of writing. It requires not a little boldness to fly in the face of an opinion so generally received, and which has so many respectable authorities in its support, and none against it but those of reason and fair logical deductions from uncontroverted facts. As you have, however, in a manner challenged me to produce the proof of my assertions, I do not hesitate to do it, in the spirit of humility which becomes me, and submitting the whole to your candor and better judgment.

“This opinion has naturally led to that of the Chinese

* *The Chinese*, by J. F. Davis, Vol. II. p. 140.

writing being an universal written language, conveying ideas directly to the mind, and which might be read alike in every idiom upon earth, as our numerical figures and algebraic signs are. This idea has been carried so far, that some missionaries have wished, that the Chinese *written language*, as it is called, should be cultivated through the whole world ; for then the New Testament, being translated into Chinese, all nations might read it, without learning the spoken idiom, and on a mere inspection of the characters. And, as a proof that this might be done, it has been alleged, that the Japanese, Co-reans, Cochinchinese, and other nations, could read Chinese books without knowing or understanding the oral language of China. But these are not the only wonderful systems to which this opinion has given rise.

“ This writing having been formed, as is supposed, without any reference to, or connexion with, spoken language, a question might naturally arise, which of the two was first invented. Nobody, to be sure, has ventured to say, that writing existed before speech ; yet, if that proposition has not been directly advanced, I must say, that sinologists have come very near to it. For instance, they affect to call the monosyllabic words of the Chinese language the *pronunciation* of the characters ; which leads to the direct inference, that the *words* were made for the *signs*, and not these for the words. A justly celebrated French sinologist, M. Abel Rémusat, does not, indeed, believe that a language was invented to suit the written characters *after* they were formed ; but he supposes, that some then existing popular idiom was *adopted*, to serve as a *pronunciation* to the graphic signs.* One step more (and hardly that) and *written* characters must have been invented before men learned to speak.” — pp. 105 – 108.

The learned author then states very briefly some of his reasons for calling in question the prevailing opinion, and for entertaining one directly contrary to it. But as his “ Dissertation ” exhibits these, and various new grounds of argument, in a more expanded form than was admissible in his “ Letter,” we shall consider them presently in our examination of that part of the present volume.

The letter to Captain Hall was published by that gentleman in an English scientific journal, (“ Annals of Philosophy,” for January, 1829,) and, from that circumstance, was not brought immediately under the notice of philologists and

* “ *Mélanges Asiatiques*, Vol. II. p. 52.”

others, whose pursuits were purely literary, and who would not resort to a journal of that class for information upon questions in literature. In China, however, Mr. Du Ponceau's opinions excited no little attention among the European residents ; who, having by mere practice, and without any study of the principles of the language, become able to chatter fluently, on the affairs of their daily business, in the colloquial dialect of Canton, with a natural self-complacency looked contemptuously upon any individual out of the territory of the Celestial Empire, who should presume to entertain different opinions from themselves, upon the language of China, even though his opinions should be the result of great study and investigation.

Accordingly, in the "Canton Register" (of March 17th, 1830,) we find a notice of Mr. Du Ponceau, and his correspondent Captain Hall, in which the opinions of both are treated with as little ceremony as might be expected under such circumstances. Captain Hall had stated (in his "Travels,") the new views suggested by Mr. Du Ponceau, which struck him with much force ; and remarked, that he had himself formerly published the opinion, "that in China, Japan, Corea, and Loo-Choo, though the *spoken* languages were different, the *written* character was common to them all ; and consequently, that, when any two natives of the different countries met, though neither could *speak* a word of the others' language, they would readily interchange their thoughts by means of *written* symbols." But he became satisfied by Mr. Du Ponceau's arguments, that this was an error ; he very candidly regretted, "that an error of this magnitude in the history of language, should still have currency" ; and this regret on his part was the occasion of publishing Mr. Du Ponceau's Letter to him. The writer in the "Canton Register," however, who had on another occasion taken the gallant Captain to task, for his boldness of assertion in the presence of Bonaparte, now censures him for his want of boldness in the presence of Mr. Du Ponceau, and will not permit him to acknowledge, that he had committed any error in the case ; but stoutly maintains, that his original assertion was correct ; that is, that in China, Japan, Corea, and Loo-Choo, the Chinese *written* language is generally understood, by all who can be said to read and write ; and that it is equally certain, that "when any two natives, who can *write* the Chinese charac-

ter, meet, though neither could *speaking* a word of the other's language, they can readily interchange their thoughts by means of the Chinese *written symbols*." The writer in the "Canton Register" adds, that, he has himself interchanged thoughts with Cochinchinese, Japanese, and Loo-Chooans, by means of the Chinese characters, although he could not understand one word they uttered, nor could they understand his speech. "Therefore, for all practical purposes, whether of religion, science, or commerce, it is difficult to see wherein Captain Hall's first assertion is erroneous." The writer then re-affirms his opinion, that the Chinese character *is* thus generally understood by five nations; and adds, in a peculiarly significant and courteous manner, towards Captain Hall and his learned correspondent, that, "seriously would it be to be regretted, that this fact should lose its hold on the mind of any Christian philanthropist, by the confessions of Captain Hall, before the President of the American Philosophical Society." *

We shall presently see, that, notwithstanding this writer has the advantage of residing on that little, confined spot of the Celestial Empire, which is allotted to foreign "barbarians," and where he ought to have obtained better information, yet he is altogether mistaken in his assertion, that the Chinese *written characters* are common, as a national system of writing, to the five nations mentioned by him. On the contrary, the fact is, that these characters are *not* common to the people of those nations in any other manner than the written words of the *French* language, for example, are common to the nations of Europe; that is, they are common to the people of those nations who have studied and learned to write them; just as among the *spoken* languages of North America, the Chippeway, for instance, is a *common* language of trade and other intercourse with various Indian tribes of totally different stocks; who from this circumstance, however, have been represented, by superficial and blundering travellers, as all speaking the same language, although their respective mother tongues are as unintelligible to each other, as Chinese is to an Englishman.

We shall presently consider this fact more at large; and

* *Canton Register*, March 17th, 1830.

shall now proceed to the "Dissertation," and other parts of Mr. Du Ponceau's important volume.

After an *Introduction*, which contains a summary view of the main question, the learned author gives us an elaborate dissertation on the subject at large, in the form of a letter addressed to John Vaughan, Esquire, his respected friend and fellow member of the Philosophical Society at Philadelphia; a well-merited tribute to one, whose zeal and exertions in the cause of science and literature are well known.

It seems, that the circumstance which immediately led to the publication of the present volume was, the receipt of two manuscript Vocabularies of the Cochin-Chinese language, belonging to the valuable collection of that excellent establishment, the East India Marine Society, at Salem, in this State; to which association they had been presented by Lieutenant (now Captain) John White, an enterprising and intelligent officer of the American Navy; whose "Voyage to the China Sea" is well known to every reader, and who has, in the present instance, been the means of rendering an important service to the literature of his country, while he has set an example, which we hope will be followed by his brother officers, who may have the like opportunity of aiding the researches of their countrymen in the fields of literature or science. The history of the two manuscripts is thus given by Mr. Du Ponceau.

"A favorable circumstance brought these manuscripts into this country. In the year 1819, two vessels sailed from the port of Salem, in Massachusetts, on a commercial voyage to the China Seas, and touched at *Cochin-China*. They were, it is said, the first American ships that ascended the Don-nai river, and displayed the stars and stripes before the city of Saigon. On board of one of those vessels was Lieutenant White, of the United States Navy. During his stay in the capital, he became acquainted with Father Joseph Morrone, an Italian missionary, who made him a present of the above mentioned Vocabularies; the one in *Cochin-Chinese and French*, consisting of three hundred and thirty-three words, *with the appropriate characters prefixed to each*; the other, more voluminous, *Cochin-Chinese and Latin*, in the alphabetic form of a dictionary, but *without the characters*." — p. 4.

These two manuscripts are now published, on the suggestion and under the direction of Mr. Du Ponceau, by the Philosophical Society at Philadelphia. The first, in two columns, (the

second column being a comparison of the Cochin-Chinese with the Chinese,) and in an English translation ; the other in its original state, *Cochin-Chinese and Latin*.

Mr. Du Ponceau justly estimates the importance of these manuscripts (which had been requested for publication in France), and observes, what we also believe to be the fact, that no similar work has yet been published in Asia or Europe.

“ The languages of Tonquin and Cochin-China,” as he remarks, “ and, in general, the Ultra-Gangetic idioms, are very little known in Europe, and even in British India. The *Tonquinese* and *Cochin-Chinese* are sister languages to the Chinese, which they not only resemble in the derivation of their words, but in their monosyllabic character and grammatical structure ; and their *graphic* system is evidently borrowed from that of China. *A comparison of those languages*, therefore, as spoken, and written, is a subject of considerable interest.” — pp. 1, 2.

With the aid of these two Vocabularies, Mr. Du Ponceau has accordingly made the comparison here mentioned ; and this comparison, with the investigations which he has made in consequence, has led him to the results stated in the following propositions ;

“ 1. That the *Chinese* system of *writing* is not, as has been supposed, *ideographic* ; that its characters do not represent *ideas*, but *words*, and therefore I have called it *lexigraphic*.*

“ 2. That *ideographic* writing is a creature of the imagination, and cannot exist, but for very limited purposes, which do not entitle it to the name of *writing*.

“ 3. That, among men endowed with the gift of speech, all *writing* must be a direct representation of the *spoken language*, and cannot present ideas to the mind abstracted from it.

“ 4. That all writing, as far as we know, represents language in some of its elements, which are *words*, *syllables*, and *simple sounds*. In the first case it is *lexigraphic* ; in the second, *syllabic* ; and in the third, *alphabetical* or *elementary*.

“ 5. That the *lexigraphic* system of the Chinese cannot be applied to a polysyllabic language, having *inflections* and grammatical forms ; and that there is no example of its being so applied, unless partially or occasionally, or as a special, ellipti-

* In the Letter to Captain Hall (page 110), we observe Mr. Du Ponceau uses the word *logographic*, in describing the Chinese system.

cal, and enigmatical mode of communication, limited in its uses ; but not as a general system of writing, intended for common use.*

“ 6. That it may be applied to a monosyllabic language, formed on the model of the Chinese ; but that it will necessarily receive modifications and alterations which will produce material differences in the value and significations of the characters between different languages, however similar in their original structure ; and therefore

“ 7. That nations, whose languages, like the Japanese, and (as it is said) the Loo-Chooan, are polysyllabic, and have inflections and grammatical forms, although they may employ Chinese characters in their alphabet, *cannot possibly understand Chinese books and manuscripts, unless they have learned the Chinese language* ; and that if those nations, whose languages are monosyllabic, and who use the Chinese characters *lexigraphically*, can understand Chinese writings, without knowing the language, it can only be to a limited extent, which it is one of the objects of this publication to ascertain.”— pp. xxxi., xxxii.

Mr. Du Ponceau adds, with that modesty which his adversaries and critics would do well to imitate ;

“ Although strongly impressed with the conviction of the truth of these propositions, it is nevertheless with great deference, that I submit them to the judgment of the learned.” — p. xxxii.

From this statement of the results, it will be apparent, that the discussion involves a consideration of some of the highest questions in general philology ; the examination of which would demand more space, than can be reasonably expected to be devoted to the subject in our pages. We shall, therefore, confine our remarks principally to the simple fact of the true nature of the *Chinese system of writing* ; of which we are bound to say, in the outset, that we are inclined to agree with our learned author, — that it is not, as has been commonly supposed, *ideographic* ; in other words, that the characters do not present to the mind *ideas* unconnected with *vocal sounds*, so as to make what is called an *ocular* language, of which words are only the *pronunciation* ; and, consequently, (as Mr. Du Ponceau observes,) “ a system of

“ * In our alphabets we have single letters which represent *words* ; as A, E, I, and O, in Latin ; A and I, in English ; E and O in Italian ; U, in low Dutch ; Y, in Spanish and French, &c. These are at the same time, *elementary, syllabic, and lexicographic*.”

pasigraphy, to be read alike in all languages ; which absurd consequence appears now to be abandoned by philologists.”

The argument in support of the *ideographic* nature of the Chinese characters has rested, first, upon the authority of travellers, missionaries, and others, who have visited China ; and, in the next place, upon the assumed fact, that these characters are read and understood by the Cochinchinese, Japanese, and other nations who speak various languages, and are ignorant of the language of China. Both of these grounds of argument terminate in the simple matter of fact, whether the different nations, alluded to, do understand the Chinese written language, without having ever studied it. We think our author has satisfactorily shown that they do not ; and we shall now submit his views to the reader, with such occasional remarks as have occurred to us in following him through his work.

The Chinese language is always described by philologists as a *monosyllabic* language ; each syllable is significant, and constitutes a *word*, as we usually denominate it. These words, or syllables, may be joined together in speaking, like our English words, *something*, *sometimes*, or they may be separated, as was formerly the fashion in writing and printing, into two words, or monosyllables ; as *some thing*, *some times*, &c. In the rapidity of speech there is no apparent difference in the utterance of these words, whether we analyze them into syllables or not ; and it is only by the typographical arrangement of the syllables, that we are aware of any difference, and call them monosyllables or polysyllables at pleasure. It is, therefore, as Mr. Du Ponceau observes, of no consequence, whether the Chinese language, *as spoken*, be called monosyllabic or polysyllabic ; but it is important to know, that every one of its syllables is a *word* ; and, as each character represents a syllable (which is called its *pronunciation*), it necessarily follows, that each character represents a *word*.*

In accordance with these views of Mr. Du Ponceau, we have often thought, that, so far as relates to *spoken* language, the people of all nations, Europeans as well as Chinese, utter themselves, not in single syllables, or words, as we usually call them, but in *sentences*, or *masses of vocal sounds*, each of which sentences or masses may, in a certain sense, be

called a *word*, whether it consists of one syllable only or of many. Such is human speech by nature ; and the analyzing of each sentence, or mass, into single words, and each word into syllables, is an artificial process of the grammarians, who philosophize upon the constituent parts of human speech, as the anatomist does upon the component parts of the human body. This analysis, too, is often wholly insensible to the *ear*, and is not perceivable till the vocal sounds are reduced to writing ; then the eye takes cognizance of the analysis, and we make the separate syllables to be words, or parts of words, according to the taste or fancy (with some limitations) which happens to prevail in different ages. In our own language various changes in this respect have taken place within the last century ; and several words which are now written as compounds, were formerly written in their uncompounded state, each component syllable being treated as a distinct word. The words above mentioned, — *something*, *sometimes*, are familiar examples. Words of this class, according to the process which has generally taken place in our language, are at first united into a compound term by means of a hyphen ; by degrees the hyphen is omitted, the component syllables are brought into immediate union, and then constitute what we afterwards call a single word.

Now the effect upon the ear, as we have before intimated, is precisely the same, whether the component syllables of a word, or the component words of a phrase, are written separately or in the united form. For example ; the four monosyllabic words, which compose the familiar question, *How do you do ?* fall upon the *ear* precisely like a single word of four syllables ; and the question might (for the ear) just as well be written in one word, *howdoyoudo*, as the monosyllables *yes*, and *no*, in answer to any question. In the same manner, so far as regards the ear, the well known monosyllabic line of Pope, —

“ And ten low words oft creep in one dull line,”
might be written either in two or more portions, thus,

“ And ten low words oft creep in one dull line,”
or even as one entire word of ten syllables, —

“ And ten low words oft creep in one dull line,”
which is but little longer than various words in our language, such as *incomprehensibility*, *incommensurability*, &c.

This point may be further illustrated by a comparison of the Chinese language itself with our own.

In Chinese (dialect of Canton), *tsam chung*, written as two monosyllabic words, signify a *silkworm*, which we, like the Chinese, might still write in two separate words, *silk worm*, as our fathers formerly did. In Ainsworth's Dictionary, it is so written ; Johnson consolidated the two into one word ; and our countryman, Dr. Webster, in his small Dictionary (1806), followed Johnson ; but in his large Dictionary, we observe, he has changed his opinion, and divided it into two words, with a hyphen between them, *silk-worm*. Again ; the Chinese names of the different kinds of tea, are each written in English, as one word (usually a dissyllable), though it is well known, that, to make the English word, we unite two distinct words of the original Chinese ; as will be seen by the following examples, in which the word *chah* (still preserved in the Portuguese and Russian languages), is the generic term *tea*, and the accompanying syllables are the specific names :

Sew	chung	chah,	Souchong tea,
Pek	how	chah,	Pekkie tea,
Mow	ee	chah,	Bohea tea,
Sew	chu	chah,	Gunpowder tea ;

in which last example we might in our language have divided the word *gun powder*, and have kept the same number of words as in the Chinese. The word *gunpowder* itself is another illustration of this process of compounding and decompounding language. The Chinese, in Canton, call *gunpowder*, *fo yok* (*fire drug*, or *fire physic*), and write it in two separate parts or words ; just as we anciently did in English, *gun powder*, and might still continue to do, if custom or caprice had not established a different mode. In Chinese, again, the two syllables *chah che* signify a *tea spoon*, and *chah seong*, a *tea chest*, both of which we still write in two separate words, like the Chinese.

On the other hand, when the Chinese adopt from us a word of more than one syllable, they analyze it into monosyllables, as the genius of their language requires ; thus, of the English word *pudding*, they make what we call two words, and they write it *poo teen* 布顛 and not *pooteen*, in one, as they might do, so far as the ear is concerned, and in conformity with our rule. We fancy, by the way, that the reader will

be puzzled to find any thing in these characters *ideographic* of the substantial article of English cookery in question.

We will not pursue these illustrations any further, and will only add, that, as we speak in entire sentences or masses, according to the views above expressed, it would be natural, that, in committing the spoken language to writing, men should at first have written down the consecutive words of a sentence, without any separation, just as we now find them in the most ancient manuscripts.

Adopting, then, as we do, the reasoning of Mr. Du Ponceau, it is difficult for us to resist his conclusion; which is, that the Chinese *characters* are not unconnected with *sounds*, unless it should be contended (as he observes), that a syllable is not a *sound*. A syllable, indeed,

“ may by analysis be reduced to more simple elements; but, though composed of those elements, it is still a reverberation of the human voice, produced at once, and in the same breath by the organs of speech. If, then, syllables are *sounds*, monosyllabic words are so likewise; and the *characters* which represent them, cannot be said *not to be connected* with them as such.” p. 19.

But at this stage of the argument, we are met by an objection, that the number of characters in the Chinese language is not less than *thirty* thousand, on the lowest computation; and some state it as high as eighty thousand; while the (spoken) *words* do not exceed *two* thousand.

To this objection our author answers, — that the different *characters* are only so many different ways of spelling the same *word*; that a great many of the characters are out of use, and the whole number *actually employed* is very small. In proof of this, we may observe here, that, according to Sir George Staunton, the whole of the *Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, or Penal Code of China, which he translated, contains only about two thousand characters.

But the difference, in point of numbers, between the written and spoken words, is not so great as is generally supposed. For, as our author further observes,

“ In the first place, there are a great many *homophonous* words, which being pronounced alike, are, I presume, considered as one and the same pronunciation of different *characters*, and not so many different *words*, in relation to their sense. It is the same as if, in our own language, we should consider as one the words *fain*, *fane*, and *feign*, because pronounced alike, although they differ in meaning widely from each other.

“There is,” he adds, “another mode of computation, which is directly the reverse of this. Because the monosyllables of the Chinese language are significant, they alone have been honored with the name of *words*, and their numerous compounds have been left out of view. I have said above, that those monosyllables might be compounded precisely as those of our own language, in *welcome*, *welfare*, &c. ; and I may add here, that the greatest part of the Chinese idiom is formed of those *compounds*, which are separated only by the manner in which they are exhibited to the eye, when written. Thus in *our* dictionaries, *shoemaker* is found as a polysyllabic word ; while *pear-tree* is not, but each of its component syllables must be looked for in its proper place, according to the alphabet. And yet it would seem that *pear-tree* is as much one word in English, as *shoemaker*, *shipwright*, and so many others. There are *English* words, which in *Chinese*, are expressed by *five* significant monosyllables. It is evident, that nothing is wanting but to give to the Chinese compounds the denomination of *words*, to make that language as rich, perhaps, as those whose composition is disguised by the foreign origin of the monosyllables, or the more artificial manner in which they are joined together.” — pp. 21, 22.

The justness of these views cannot be contested by any one who duly reflects upon what takes place in our own language ; as has been shown in the illustrations before given.

We shall now proceed to consider very briefly the simple fact asserted by English and other writers, that the Chinese characters are common, as a *written* language, to the Japanese, Cochinchinese, Coreans, and some other nations, who, it is asserted, cannot understand each other's *spoken* language.

We begin with the Japanese ; and here we find, in the very outset, a marked distinction between this and the Chinese language ; that the Japanese is *polysyllabic*, and has declensions, conjugations, &c. ; and this structure of the language precludes the use of the Chinese characters *lexigraphically*, (as Mr. Du Ponceau calls it,) without material modifications.

In the next place, the Japanese have a *syllabic alphabet*, or *syllabary*, consisting of forty-seven characters, and called (from its first three characters) the *I-ro-fa* ; as ours was originally named, from its first two, the *alphabet*. The knowledge of this very limited number of characters, it is obvious, would not enable a Japanese to read the numerous characters used by the Chinese, whether we reckon them at eighty or thirty thousand, or at a much lower number.

The truth is, the Japanese adopted from the Chinese as many characters as were required for their language ; and of these, four only are now entirely Chinese. Their historians relate, that, in the year of Christ 284, their sovereign sent an embassy to the Emperor of China, to request of him a man to civilize his kingdom. *Vo-nin*, a prince of imperial blood, was sent. He introduced the Chinese civilization, language, and literature ; and for a long period there was no written language in Japan, except the Chinese ; in which all the learning of the country was contained, just as happened in Italy and France during the dark periods of the Middle Ages, in the case of the Latin language. It was not till the year 733, that a selection was made from the Chinese of *forty-seven* characters, and applied to the Japanese language, by one *Kibi*, a man of high rank, who modified the characters to adapt them to the syllables, of which his alphabet (or syllabary) was composed.

The Chinese language, thus introduced into Japan, still remains there as a *learned language*, and is taught as such. Many of its words, too, have been adopted by the Japanese into their language ; and this is also the case in various other countries. The Japanese, therefore, who have *not learned the Chinese* language cannot make themselves understood by the Chinese, in *writing*, any more than in *speaking*. For these views of the language, we refer such of our readers, as may wish to pursue the subject, to the works cited in the margin.*

We may add further, that Chinese books are constantly *translated* into Japanese, and *vice versâ* ; but what necessity would there be for this, if the two nations used a *written* language in common ? We have now before us a Comparative Vocabulary of the *Chinese*, *Corean*, and *Japanese* languages, originally compiled by a native of Corea, and published at

* 1. *Explication des Syllabaires Japonais*, par J. P. Abel Rémusat. (With plates. Prefixed to the French Translation of Father Rodriguez's "Japanese Grammar," by M. Landresse.) Paris : Dondey Dupré. 1825.

2. *Epitome Linguae Japonicæ*, auctore Ph. F. Siebold. pp. 70. (With plates. In the 11th Volume of the *Bataviaasche Verhandelingen*.) Batavia. 1826.

3. *Sur l'Introduction de l'Usage des Caractères, Chinois au Japon, et sur l'Origine des différents Syllabaires Japonais*, par M. Klaproth. pp. 30. (With plates, in the 3d Volume of the *Nouveau Journal Asiatique*.) Paris : Imprimerie Royale. 1829.

4. *An English and Japanese, and Japanese and English Vocabulary*. Compiled from Native Works. By W. H. Medhurst. Batavia : 1830.

Batavia, in 1835 ; in which the *Chinese* character is first written at the top of the page, then follows the *sound* of that character, expressed in *Corean* letters, after that comes the *Corean* word (both in the vernacular and learned idioms), and finally, the *Japanese*, all expressed in *Corean* letters.* Besides, it is a well-known fact, that there are various native dictionaries, in *Chinese*, with *Japanese* explanations ; and in *Japanese*, with interpretations in *Chinese*. *Chinese* books, with *interlineary* *Japanese* translations, are also used in *Japan*.†

It will be interesting to many readers, who have not had occasion to direct their attention to *Japanese* literature, to know the curious fact, that the Empress Catherine of Russia, whose great *Comparative Vocabulary* gave a most powerful impulse to philological studies, actually established in her dominions a professorship of the *Japanese* language, at Irkutsk, in Eastern Siberia. It had been observed, as M. Klaproth states, for a century,

“ that *Japanese* vessels had been driven by stress of weather upon the coasts of Kamchatka. These vessels, being ordinarily intended merely for the coasting trade along the shores of Japan, were not properly equipped to be at sea for a long time, and their crews were accordingly always found reduced by hunger and distress to one half, or one third of their original number. Russian hospitality never failed to receive these unfortunate shipwrecked men ; and the commanding officers in Kamchatka, conformably to their orders, sent them to Irkutsk, because, according to the laws of Japan, no person born in that kingdom, and having quitted it, can return to it again under the penalty of death. The Empress Catherine the Second, desiring to turn to account the residence of those unfortunate persons in her dominions, established at Irkutsk a *School for Navigation*, and with it a professor’s chair for the *Japanese Language* ; which probably yet remains. The chair is always filled by a *Japanese*, who teaches his native language to some of the young Russians ; but these pupils seldom make much progress.”

M. Klaproth adds, that during his residence at Irkutsk, in 1805 and 1806, the chair was occupied by a *Japanese* named *Sinsou*, a native of Isseï, who, being converted to the Greek

* This work is published under the name of *Philo-Sinensis* ; who is understood to be the Reverend W. Medhurst, the intelligent missionary in the East.

† See Mr. Medhurst’s recent *Account of China*, p. 276, Amer. edit. It should be remarked, that Mr. Medhurst’s work was not published till a long time after Mr. Du Ponceau’s various publications on this subject.

religion, had taken the Russian name of *Kolotygin*, and for his name of baptism and surname, *Nikolai Petrovitch*.*

We must now ask the reader's attention, for a few moments, to the instance of the *Corean* language ; which, as Mr. Gutzlaff justly observes, is but little known. The inhabitants of that peninsula, it is constantly asserted, understand the *written* language of China ; but this is not the fact ; though it is true, that they, like the Japanese, have a mixture of Chinese in their language.

The simple fact above stated by us, that we have now before us a Comparative Vocabulary of the Chinese, *Corean*, and Japanese languages, compiled by a *native of Corea*, sufficiently shows, that the people of that country require translations of Chinese books, and cannot read the written character of China, without having studied it. In *Corea*, the Chinese is a *learned language* ; and the inhabitants would pronounce a man to be "illiterate" who could not read it ; as Captain Hall says he was considered, by the people of the Loo-Choo Islands, for the same reason. The *Corean* alphabet is very ingenious, being at once syllabic and elementary ; but the whole number of characters (several hundred) may be analyzed into fifty-two syllables or elements.

We forbear going into further particulars in respect to this language ; and will here add only one general remark on the use of the Chinese *characters* by other nations. Although the Chinese civilized those nations (the Japanese, Coreans, &c.), and introduced their own language and writing among them, yet the Chinese system of writing could not be applied to the idioms of all of them, and the natives accordingly devised alphabets, or graphic systems, of their own. The *Cochin-Chinese* and *Tonquinese*, however, whose languages are monosyllabic, adopted the Chinese system, but with modifications, to adapt it to their idioms ; and, what is a most material fact in relation to the ideographic theory, those nations, in numberless instances, applied the Chinese characters to the *sound* which they wanted to represent, and not to the *sense* of the character.

We shall now advert to the case of the *Cochin-Chinese*, who, it is asserted, also make use of the written language of China, in common with the inhabitants of that empire, though they cannot understand the spoken language. The two important *Cochin-Chinese* Vocabularies, which were the imme-

* *Nouveau Journal Asiatique*, Tom. III. p. 19, (for January, 1829.)

diate occasion of Mr. Du Ponceau's publication, and which we have now before us, afford ample materials for deciding this question.

The mere fact, in this case, as in that of the Japanese, is, that in Cochín-China, the Chinese is a learned language, and as such is understood by educated persons. The Cochín-Chinese have, it is true, adapted the characters of it to their own spoken language, but not without many modifications; and, as we just now observed, in thus applying them they frequently appear to pay more regard to the *sound* than to the *meaning* of the characters, as used by the Chinese themselves. Thus, as Mr. Du Ponceau observes, the character *tsan* or *san* (in his accompanying plates), which in Chinese means *drizzling rain*, is applied in *Cochín-Chinese* to the word *sam*, thunder; the character *ko*, a lance, to *quá*, yesterday; *kin*, metal, to *kim*, a needle, &c. As much stress is laid upon this case of the Cochín-Chinese (including the other Anamitic dialects) in support of the prevailing opinion, that they use a written language in common with the Chinese, we shall, in addition to the examples above cited from Mr. Du Ponceau's work, give a few others from Morrone's Vocabulary, which will show, that this is not the fact; but that, on the contrary, they use Chinese characters just as they find them convenient, with or without changes or modifications, and not with reference to their signification in Chinese; as in English we use the Roman elementary characters (or letters) without regard to the powers which they had in the language of the Romans, from whom we have borrowed them. The valuable Notes furnished by M. de la Palun (late French consul at Richmond, Virginia), who was a pupil of Rémusat, and well versed in the Chinese language, will supply all the elucidations necessary to make the subject intelligible to every reader. We copy a few examples, with the characters, from the original manuscript vocabulary, only translating them into English. Accordingly, in the first of the following columns, after the characters, will be found the Cochín-Chinese word as pronounced in that language, with the meaning affixed to it; and then the sound and meaning affixed to the character by the Chinese. The remaining examples are extracted from Mr. Du Ponceau's printed copy, but compared with the manuscript. The reader will thus be enabled to see, at a glance, that written characters, which are applied by two nations in senses so widely different as many

of them are, cannot be used as a common language between them, except as in the case of French and other European languages, when both nations have studied them.

<i>Cochin-Chinese.</i>	<i>Chinese, of De Guignes.</i>
欺 Khi, time.	Kȳ, to despise.
店 Dêm, night.	Tién, a shop.
叱 Cha, a father.	Tchác, to be angry.
古 Cō, the neck.	Kòu, ancient.
綫 Giây', paper.	Sie, to tie or bind.
桎 Chôĩ, a broom.	Tchỹ, fetters.

The following examples are extracted from the Vocabulary as printed by Mr. Du Ponceau, to whose work we must refer the reader for the characters themselves. They may be readily found by the numbers affixed to them.

<i>Cochin-Chinese.</i>	<i>Chinese.</i>
“ 58 Cay, trees and woods.	He, stone, or seed of a fruit.
60 Goe, trunk of a tree.	Wo, a house.
67 Rung, a forest.	Ling, an angle ; square piece of wood.
70 Chuoi, figs.	Tchy, shackles (compedes)
74 Bo song, the banks of a river.	Po, a hillock ; a mound of earth for a sepulchre.
	[The bank of a river, in Chinese, according to Morrison's Anglo-Chinese Dictionary, verbo <i>Bank</i> , is <i>te pa</i> , in two characters. Why do not the Cochinchinese use these?]
88 Que, fatherland (patria)	Kwei, a kind of sceptre.
95 Nguoi ta, man.	1. Gai, some impediment ;
	2. Sie, a little, not much.
98 Me, mother.	May, a woman of an elegant figure and pleasing countenance.
117 Ten linh, the soldiers.	1. Sien, before ;
	2. Ling, another.
125 Oc, the brain.	Wo, fat.
127 Chan may, eyebrows.	Tching, happiness.
142 Vai, the shoulders.	Wei, light of the sun.

154 Mong tai, *the nails.*172 Ao, *the coat.*189 Phong, *room or chamber.*193 Kinh, *a mirror.*196 Nem, *a bed cover, blanket.*197 Mong, *a curtain.*198 Goi, *pillows.*217 Keo, *scissors.*232 Kim, *a needle.*236 Bac, *silver.*237 Vang, *gold.*241 Chi, *lead.*259 Com, *rice.*290 Khien, *ants.*Mang, *to gather.*Yaou, *the earth producing things out of season.*Fang, *a dyke or embankment.*King, *term, end, limits.*

[In Chinese, employed to indicate the pronunciation of another character for *King*, a mirror; which shows, that the sound has been more attended to than the sense.]

Men, *a rope of bamboo.*Mong, *a dream.*Hoey, *to paint.*1. Kin, *gold.*2. Chin, *an arrow.*3. Kow, *a measure of capacity.*

[All these approximate in *sound*, but not in *sense*.]

Kin, *metal.*

[We notice this word, particularly, to show how firmly great men adhere to preconceived opinions. A late eminent Sinologist in Paris, when this word was put to him as an example against the *ideographic* hypothesis, still boldly affirmed, that in no language could *kin* signify a *needle*. Yet, in the face of all theory, we have here proof, that it does actually mean a *needle*, in the language of Cochin-China.]

Po, *to land, bring a ship to shore.*Hoang, *a large bell.*Y, *a sort of kettle.*Kan, *sweet.*Tching, *a kind of oysters."*

The reader will find a few other instances of these discrepancies between the Chinese and Cochin-Chinese languages, in some of the words contained in the following table; which we subjoin, however, not with that view, but as a specimen of one of the manuscripts before mentioned. This list of words was originally selected by our learned countryman, the Reverend Dr. Jenks, of Boston, to accompany Captain White's voyage, and was published in the *American* edition of that work; but in the reprint of the *Voyage in England*, it was suppressed, — another indication, we regret to say, though a slight one, of the little interest taken by our English brethren in Chinese studies.

In copying this table, we ought to add, that we have for our present purpose so far deviated from Dr. Jenks's arrangement, as to transpose his columns, and place them in the following order; 1. the characters; 2. the Cochin-Chinese sounds or words; 3. their meaning, in English; and 4. the Chinese sounds or words.

Cochin-Chinese, of Father Morrone. Chinese, of De Guignes.

代	Do'ì	time, life	Tay'
意悶	Y' muôn'	the will	Y' mén
躰	Than	limbs, bodily members	Ty ^x [chin pen]*
跪	Qui	the knees	Ko'uey
世間	Thê gian	the world (universe)	Chi' kiên
坦	Dât	the earth	Tân ^c (plain)
民	Diân	the people (subjects)	Mîn
城	Thành	a city	Tchíng (walls)
官	Quan	magistrates	Ko'uan
牆	Vách	a wall, the walls	Tsiân ^g
車	Xe [she]	a chariot, car, carriage	Tché
茶	Tra	tea	Tchâ ^c
冊	Sach	a book	Tsé
冊傳	Sáchtruyên	a book of history	Tsé tcho'ien [tchouan]
刀	Diao	a knife	Tão
金	Kim	a needle	Kîn (metal)
釘	Dinh	a nail	Ting
金匱	Chì	lead	Y' (kettle)
金矢	Sát	iron	Tchỹ for tiế [†]
金同	Dông [`]	brass	Tông
泊	Bac	silver	Po (to land)
北	Bên bắc	the northern quarter	Ko'uey (orbit) pē
東	Ben đông	— eastern —	Ko'uey tōng
南	Ben nam	— southern —	Ko'uey nân
西	Ben tây	— western —	Ko'uey ssé [sy or si]

* Note from M. de la Palun; "The first character is the 158th [Chinese]

We must now bring our remarks on Mr. Du Ponceau's important volume to a close, though we are sensible of not having done justice to the great subjects which are so ably discussed by him, and which afford room for much more ample developments than would be admissible in our pages. The learned author himself has, perhaps, aimed at too great condensation, presuming too much upon his reader's knowledge of the subject; and he may, consequently, be misunderstood by those persons who have not given the requisite attention to the points discussed, to qualify them to judge of his labors. Whether it has been owing to this cause (we hope it has not been to any one less worthy of a candid and liberal critic), that he has fallen under the animadversion of a writer in an English review of respectable standing, we do not know.* But certain it is, that the reviewer in question has misstated various opinions, which are assumed without reason to be those of Mr. Du Ponceau.

The reviewer admits, that, in England, "it is but too much the fashion to hold certain opinions on Oriental language and history, as so many articles of faith, and the more so, when all known facts militate the most strongly against them." Absurd as this is, the reviewer seems determined to be in the fashion; and he accordingly wonders at the boldness of Mr. Du Ponceau in holding opinions opposite to those of "the learned of all Europe and of China itself"; while, however, he avows his respect for that "independence of judgment, which spurns following a tract [?] merely because it is usual."†

He misstates Mr. Du Ponceau's conclusions, when he states the following to be his results;

"1. That the Chinese character contains, like alphabetic spelling, the elements of the sound, or word;" and

"2. That the word, or name of a thing, precedes the idea of it in the mind."‡

radical, *chin*, the body. Father Morrone has probably forgotten to give its pronunciation. The second character is pronounced [in Chinese] *pen*, ignorant, coarse. *De Guignes*, 164. It is vulgarly employed for *thy*, the members of the body. *De G.* 12651. These two characters together are pronounced *chin pen*, and signify, as in Cochinchinese, *the members of the body*, or the limbs."

† "*Tchy*, to sew clothes. *De G.* 11419. But this character is also used for *Tie*, iron. *De G.* 11593." (*De la Palun*.)

* *Foreign Quarterly Review*, No. 42; for July, 1838.

‡ Page 318, London edition.

‡ Page 343.

Now we are not aware, that Mr. Du Ponceau has said any such thing as is here charged upon him. He has not said that the Chinese characters represent *elements of sounds* ; he has, indeed, stated, that they represent *words*, — which are sounds, — but not by the same elements. The Chinese characters are divisible into two classes. The simple characters, which are about two hundred, originally were figurative, according to Morrison, whom Mr. Du Ponceau expressly quotes to this point (pp. xv. xvi. of his *Introduction*), though this reviewer wonders at him for asserting this upon *his own* authority, and denies the fact himself upon the authority of those theoretical empirics, De Pauw and Hager ! Mr. Du Ponceau, still relying upon Morrison, observes, that these characters have ceased to be figurative, and are become arbitrary ; and he concludes, therefore, that they represent nothing but the words to which they are attached ; that they represent a complex sound, as the letters of the Western languages do simple ones, and occasionally compounds, as in Greek, ε , ψ , &c. The Chinese sounds, it is true, are each *coupled with an idea*, which they recall to the mind ; so, also, are some of our English simple sounds, as the vowels, or words, *A* and *I*. But this makes no difference ; our mind still receives the idea through the sound.

As to the compound characters, they are composed, by joining together two or more of the simple ones ; these are the elements of the Chinese alphabet. The elements of our alphabets are the representation of sounds *without* meaning ; those of the Chinese are sounds coupled *with* meaning ; and this is all the difference.

The reviewer has misstated Mr. Du Ponceau's views again, in representing him as maintaining, that the word, or name of a thing, precedes the idea of it in the mind ; and he takes credit to himself for combating this error ! Now, what will be the reader's surprise to know, that Mr. Du Ponceau has asserted no such thing. His views, as we understand them, are ; — in the first place, that the Chinese characters, having no outward *figure* to present ideas to the mind, can only present them through the *words* which they represent or recall ; that there is nothing in their form which can awaken an idea. It is, therefore, true, that in this case the *recollection* of the words precedes the idea ; but Mr. Du Ponceau never asserted, that this is so generally, as the reviewer would

have it understood. Ideas without words are vague and confused ; they can be fixed only by words ; and no idea comes into the mind of a Chinese, but through words.

The elements of Chinese writing are, a group of words to represent another word, — a method, which is made requisite by the great number of words to be represented. Those *elements*, as we have already observed, are sounds coupled with meaning ; ours, on the contrary (with the exceptions before stated), are sounds without meaning. Thus, says Mr. Du Ponceau, (p. xix.) “ we combine the [non-significant] letters of our alphabet to give them a meaning, which, separately, they have not. The Chinese combine their significant characters to give to the groups thus formed a meaning which none of them possess separately.”

But it is not our object to write an answer to this reviewer. We only wish to let our readers see, that he has made material misstatements of Mr. Du Ponceau's reasoning and conclusions ; and in that manner has argued down opinions, which never could have entered the mind of the latter.

We will add one remark on the subject of framing words from their constituent elements, as curiously exemplified in the aboriginal languages of America. “ Nothing,” says Mr. Schoolcraft, as cited by Mr. Du Ponceau in his *Mémoire* above referred to, “ can be more unlike than the [Chippeway] language, considered in its primitive and elementary state, — in a vocabulary, for example, where the words are in their simple forms, — and the same language when those elements are amalgamated in the customary forms of speech. The words of this language are of a nature so variable and so *transpositive*, that, like the pieces on a chess-board, their elementary syllables can change their places, to form new combinations and accommodate themselves to new circumstances.” In other words, the selection of these elements, or syllables and parts of words, depends upon the taste and will of the speaker. Mr. Du Ponceau explains this, by comparing it to the inversions of phrases in the Latin tongue, to which it manifestly bears an analogy. But what has most surprised us is, that, independently of the knowledge of the *fact* here stated by Mr. Schoolcraft, the late great and lamented philologist, Baron William Humboldt, had, by the mere force of his genius and wonderful sagacity, drawn the same conclusion. In his great posthumous work, he says ; “ From an

example given by Du Ponceau, (*kuligatchis*,) one is led to conclude, that it depends upon the speaker to change whole words or parts of words, and combine them together in one location, &c." *

We shall conclude our remarks, with a brief recapitulation of some of the results stated by Mr. Du Ponceau.

He has, we think, established by a very satisfactory course of reasoning the several propositions which we have before quoted from him at large ; † and has successfully combated the old and general opinion, that the Chinese system of writing is *ideographic* ; showing that the characters do not represent *ideas*, but *words*, which recall *ideas*.

He is the first writer, to our knowledge, who has observed the important fact, that the Cochinchinese, in numerous instances, applied the Chinese characters to the *sound*, and not to the *meaning*, of the words represented by them ; a fact, which clearly proves that the characters are not *ideographic*. We may here add a remark, which has often occurred to us on this subject ; that the Chinese characters are each applied to numerous things, and may (some of them) have thirty or forty meanings, according to the accent or inflexions of the voice. Now we ask, how is it possible, that any such written character can be *ideographic* ; in other words, how such a character can be the *picture* of so many different things at the same time ?

Conformably to these views, Mr. Du Ponceau has, with much skill and judgment systematized the science of written signs, or *graphology*, as he has somewhere called it, by dividing the systems of writing into three classes ; — *lexigraphic*, for entire words, like the Chinese ; *syllabic*, for syllables not having necessarily an acknowledged meaning ; and *elementary*, for what we call *letters*, or the least component part of a syllable. And, in respect to the case of *arithmetical figures*, to which the Chinese characters are likened, his opinion is, that they can never constitute *a language*, though they are auxiliary to some sciences, like telegraphic signs, &c. ; but their use must always be very limited.

The *ideologists*, if we may use the term, argue, that the Chinese characters perpetuate the meaning or *ideas*, while alphabetical characters perpetuate *sounds* only ; but neither of these propositions is true. The latter is not true ; for if it

* *Ueber die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java*. Vol. I. Introd. p. cccxxii. 4to. Berlin, 1836.

† Pages 289, 290.

were, we should now have the pronunciation of the Latin and Greek languages, whereas we do not even know that of our own language four hundred years ago, as any one may see by turning to his *Chaucer*, in verses where the metre does not agree with the syllables as we now read them. The words *grace* and *face*, for example, may have been dissyllables, — according to the pronunciation of the Gascons, and introduced by them while Gascony was an English province ; or, to take another example, how were the Norman French words, *jeo*, *ceo*, pronounced ? Mr. Du Ponceau conjectures, indeed, and upon good grounds, that *ceo* was pronounced as at the present day, in the *patois* of *Poitou*, that is, *tcho*, giving the *c* the Italian sound.* Again ; it may be asked, in our own language, how Shakspeare pronounced the word *aches*, which brought such a torrent of ridicule upon the tragedian Kemble, who made a dissyllable of it.

But, though sounds are lost, the groups of letters called *words* retain their meaning quite as much as the Chinese characters ; so that we can still read and understand Homer and Virgil, without knowing how they spoke ; to say nothing of the syllabic groups of letters of the Sanscrit, — a language long since dead, — the ancient Coptic, Persian, Zend, &c.

Here we are reminded of a common remark of the sinologists (adopted by Mr. Barrow†), that the Chinese characters speak equally strong to the deaf and dumb as to others. So do our groups of *letters*. Deaf and dumb persons, who never heard a sound in their lives, are taught to read and understand our books ; and, we would ask, can Chinese characters do more ?

It is most manifest, that tradition alone keeps up and preserves the connexion between written or spoken *signs* and *ideas* ; but *written* signs are only a *secondary* method, and were not intended to communicate ideas except through *words* ; because language was invented before writing, and men could not have agreed upon the meaning of written signs, except as that meaning was clothed in the words of the language to which the characters were to be applied.

We cannot conclude the present article, without adding a few remarks upon the supposed difficulty of learning the Chinese language. It has been the fate of this curious dialect of one third part of the human race, to be enveloped in mystery,

* See his *Mémoire*, p. 102.

† *Voyage to China*, chap. 6.

ever since Europeans have known that there was such a language on the globe. The impression of its extreme difficulty was, doubtless, first derived from the accounts given of it by some of the early Catholic missionaries ; and one of them, Father Nic. Longobardus, a Jesuit, so long ago as the year 1598, in a letter to his Superior, says, he was congratulated by one of his Chinese friends, on having finished reading two of their books, one *De Adultorum Disciplinâ*, and the other *De Medio Sempiterno*, as if he had accomplished a great task ; but, though his Chinese friend, with a little national vanity, declared that no person, except a native, could understand those books, the reverend Father adds, — very frankly adds, — “ I found no more difficulty than in going through Cicero or Livy.” * The opinion of its great difficulty, however, has been very general to the present day. But this and the other mysteries attendant on it, are now in some measure dissipated. Mr. Davis, whose practical knowledge of the subject is entitled to some deference on this point, — notwithstanding the sad failures in some of his *Translations* from the Chinese, for which he was too severely criticized on the Continent, — Mr. Davis, we say, assures us, that “ the rumored difficulties, from the great number and variety of the characters are the mere exaggerations of ignorance ” ; † and Mr. Du Ponceau’s investigations have shown, that this language is not so very different from others in many of the particulars in question. It is true, that writers on this subject, from age to age, have continued to tell us of the eighty thousand characters, or words ; yet a small part of these are in general use, and the rest slumber quietly in the national dictionaries, as a great proportion of our English words do in the vocabularies of our own lexicographers. *Prémare*, whose most valuable grammar (*Notitia Linguae Sinicæ*) has at length been published by the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, assures us, that after knowing *five* or *six* thousand characters, no book will stop one ; and the Chinese themselves agree, that *ten* thousand are sufficient for a *scholar*, or lettered man, to know. *Rémusat*, also, in the Preface to his Grammar says, that the Chinese language “ may be learned like any other, and does not require any greater effort of attention or memory.”

* *Epist. a P. Nicolao Longobardo, anno 1598, ab Sinis scriptæ*, etc. ; (in the Latin Collection, published by J. Hayes, 1605.)

† *Davis’s China*, Vol. II. p. 141.

It is true, that many characters have the same sound, and this occasions ambiguity. But that happens in all other languages; as in English (to take our examples from Mr. Du Ponceau), when we use the words or characters *fain*, *fane*, or *feign*, the ear can ascertain the meaning by the context alone; and in French, *cens*, *cent*, *sang*, *sans*, *sens*, *sent*, are like so many Chinese written words, having but one sound.*

Again; the want of inflections, and the promiscuous use of the same word as a verb, noun, or adjective, at pleasure, are imagined to be a source of great difficulty; yet in these particulars the Chinese language is not so very different from our own, as we should, without reflection, be led to suppose. Thus, to take an example from Dr. Marshman's valuable Chinese Grammar, (*Clavis Sinica*), the word *sound*, if it follows an article, is a substantive, *a sound*; if it follows a personal pronoun, it becomes a verb neuter, as *I sound*, *they sound*, or, with an object, an active or causal verb, *they sound the bell*; or, if it is placed between an article and a substantive, it becomes an adjective, as, *a sound vessel*. So much does the meaning and grammatical character of words in English, as well as in Chinese, depend upon their juxtaposition; verifying the just remark of Humboldt, that, in some of our modern languages, *especially in English*, phrases of considerable length may be constructed "which are perfectly Chinese."† Ambiguities must, from the imperfection incident to all human language, happen among the Chinese, as well as other nations. We may add, however, as an amusing singularity, that, as no new word can be introduced without the imperial authority, so an ambiguity, even in a man's name, can be removed by the same power; as will be seen by the following curious proclamation from the "Government Gazette," at Peking, — "Whereas, the names of the Viceroy of Yunnan, and the Lieutenant-General of that province, being pronounced alike, though differently written, may occasion some confusion, it is therefore ordered, that the Lieutenant-General, *Shoo-lin* do change his name to *Schoo-ching*." *Edict of May 15th*, 1800. Our host of English and American *John-Smiths*, would soon be extinguished in the Celestial Empire.

* *Mémoire*, p. 42.

† *Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat*, p. 16.

Many other alleged difficulties might be noticed, if our limits would permit. There are, in the Chinese, Cochinchinese, and other languages of that family, delicacies and peculiarities of idiom, accent, and tone, which foreigners never can acquire, any more than a Chinese could learn English so perfectly, as to pass for a native. In the Cochinchinese, for example, the natives speak in a *singing* tone, almost like the recitative of an Italian opera ; as Captain White has personally informed us (with an imperfect imitation of the tones), and as is stated by Father Morrone, who says of their mode of utterance, "When they speak, they sing."* These niceties, however, are wholly unimportant to the philological student, or any other person, who does not intend to reside among the natives, but only wishes to acquire the written language ; and this, we are convinced, can be accomplished with very little, if any more labor, than is necessary in learning any other language.

ART. VIII. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *American Education ; or, Strictures on the Nature, Necessity, and Practicability of a System of National Education, suited to the United States.* By the Rev. BENJAMIN O. PEERS. *With an Introductory Letter*, by FRANCIS L. HAWKS, D. D. New York : Published by John L. Taylor. 1838. 12mo. pp. 364.

LET any man, dwelling in the United States, consider this fact ; that he is living in the midst of some millions of human beings, having strong bodies, strong wills, clear heads, and mighty passions ; let him consider, further, that these millions suffer him to pursue his business, and sleep quietly at night, because they see it to be their interest, or feel it to be their duty, to do so, but that, as soon as they cease to see their interest, or feel their duty, they may pull his house about his ears and hang him upon the nearest tree ; — and he will feel, to his heart's core, the necessity of wide-spread moral and religious education *to his own safety*. And, should he go one

* *MS. Vocab.* Dr. Ruschenberger, in his account of the Embassy of Mr. Roberts, says the same.